

Big Water Bulletin

December-January 2010

Spring brings cutoff wall construction to Pahokee

Progress on installing the Herbert Hoover Dike partial cutoff wall is moving along well, with 11 miles under contract and about five miles completed to date. In several months, construction will start in the City of Pahokee.

"We've installed most of the wall in the northern and southern sections of Reach 1, from Port Mayaca to Belle Glade. From February through May 2010, we anticipate putting task orders out for cutoff wall work in the City of Pahokee vicinity," said **Mike Rogalski, HHD Rehabilitation Program** manager for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District.

About six miles of work is near homes that back-up to the dike. Corps officials anticipate a noise increase, mostly from large vehicles that transport materials on site. Once set up, contractors may work 24-hour operations to expedite construction, but they must operate within local and state Noise Abatement Ordinance.

"It's likely once the dike cutoff wall work begins behind a home, it'll take some time to move out of that particular area. Contractors are averaging 300 feet per week of cutoff wall installation, and normally operate at one site for at least a week or two before moving their work limits to a new location," Rogalski said.

The Corps of Engineers coordinated with Pahokee City officials to keep a marina entranceway open throughout construction operations. Safety is going to be a key factor.

"It's important that everyone – Corps employees, contractors and the residents of Pahokee – remain diligent around the busy work areas. All it takes is one act of inattention, and someone could get badly hurt," Rogalski said.

Look for more information on upcoming construction in the February-March edition of *Big Water Bulletin*.

Corps of Engineers installs manatee protection systems on Okeechobee Waterway



Special gates help protect manatees as they travel through locks on the Okeechobee Waterway.

In an effort to protect the endangered manatee, the **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District** has installed manatee protection systems at many of its locks and dams on the Okeechobee Waterway. In most cases, these protective measures include using screens and acoustical arrays.

The federal government listed the **West Indian Manatee** on the endangered species list in 1967, and actively began protecting the manatee under the **1972 Marine Mammal Protection Act** and the **1973 Endangered Species Act**. To this day, the manatee remains on the endangered species list.

This slow-moving aquatic mammal spends most of its time feeding on vegetation in warm, shallow waters. The slow-moving nature of this gentle giant is a major factor in its high mortality rate. The **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service** says south Florida's flood reduction structures and the gates that allow commercial and recreational boats were, at one time, the second highest cause of human-related manatee death in the state. The flood gates and canal locks can kill manatees either by crushing or drowning them. With the implementation of manatee protection systems, however, travel through the locks for the animal has become much safer.

"All locks operated and maintained by Corps of Engineers on the Okeechobee Waterway have manatee screens," says Jim Hammond, chief of navigation, field engineering, maintenance and readiness sections with the Corps' South Florida Operations Office. The screens prevent manatees from entering confined spaces located at the bottom of the gates, which could crush the manatee while the gates are moving. The screens are similar to chain-link fencing and extend roughly six inches from the bottom of the gate to water level.

Hammond says that in addition to the screens, all locks either have or are in the process of having the Acoustical Array Manatee Protection Systems installed. The **Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute** of Fort Pierce developed the acoustical arrays and helped install them. Installed on the lock gate, the device generates

signals that are picked up by receivers on the opposite gate. If a manatee enters the gate, the sensors will activate visual and audio alarms, which will then automatically reopen the gate.

In partnership with other agencies, the Corps of Engineers hopes to make a difference in protecting the vulnerable manatee from extinction.



Manatee protection systems are on all Corps-operated locks on the Okeechobee Waterway: W.P. Franklin, Ortona, Moore Haven, Port Mayaca and St. Lucie.



Clewiston supervisor brings diverse experience to the job



Jim Hammond is chief of navigation, readiness and maintenance for the Corps of Engineers south Florida operations.

For more than 30 years, **Jim Hammond** has served his country. His journey began in the U.S. Army as a young man, and is continuing today in the Army Corps of Engineers.

The soft-spoken Hammond began his service in the early 1970s as a communications chief in the Army. He spent several years as a master electrician in the commercial building sector before returning to the military in 1981, this time as a civilian employee with the Department of Navy. In 1996 Hammond opted for a reassignment to the Corps of Engineers' **South Florida Operations Office** in Clewiston.

Thirteen years later, his service includes overseeing four critical functions: the day-to-day maintenance of the **Herbert Hoover Dike**, and the planning and operations for the **Okeechobee Waterway Navigation Project**, **Central and South Florida Flood Damage Reduction Project**, and the **Canaveral Lock Project**. Hammond supervises more than 50 employees and is responsible for making sure that all four functions are running smoothly, while maintaining the confidence of his customers – the general public.

"It's a demanding but challenging job, and I love a challenge" says Hammond, who in 2004 discovered first-hand how challenging it could be. Prior to one of the most active hurricane seasons on record, Hammond was temporarily assigned to the position of chief of navigation, readiness and maintenance. After his impressive performance, the Corps placed him in the position permanently.

During the busy 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons, Hammond and his staff spent many hours at the Corps' operations office. "With our families safe, all our attention was focused on the job," and that job included ensuring the safety of the public. Once the winds of the passing storms subsided, he and his team were out inspecting structures, assessing damage and making expedient repairs. There were a lot of anxious moments, he said, especially after Hurricane Wilma because it damaged so many Lake Okeechobee communities and other areas of Florida.

When asked what the best part of his job is, Hammond said, "The people I work with and their level of professionalism. When it comes down to it, we're a tight-knit family." His "other" family includes his wife, Ana, four adult children and 12 grandchildren. The Hammond's family resides in Clewiston.

Faces of the Corps



The Corps' South Florida Operations Office wishes you a joyous holiday season and a very happy New Year. More than 80 staff members are responsible for operating and maintaining structures and navigation channels throughout south Florida 24 hours a day.



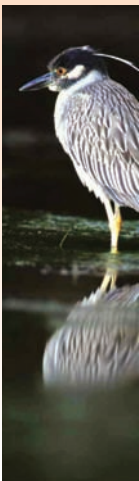
Col. Al Pantano reaches to shake the hand of Pahokee Mayor Wayne Whitaker during a Veterans Day ceremony in Pahokee Nov. 11. Commander of the Corps of Engineers' Jacksonville District, Pantano thanked the mayor for providing him an opportunity to present a keynote address and to experience Pahokee's celebration of veterans everywhere. The Corps also participated in the Veterans Day ceremony in Clewiston.

To Learn More

Both CERP and the dike strengthening project will take years to complete. There are many ways to keep informed and get involved. Both have Web sites, newsletters, and public meetings.

The Corps of Engineers has an active community outreach program around the lake, too. To learn more, visit www.saj.usace.army.mil or call 1-800-291-9405.

For more information about Everglades restoration and how it affects you, visit www.evergladesplan.org or call 1-877-CERP-USA.



Herbert Hoover Dike rehabilitation meeting in the works

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District will host a public meeting in February on the draft **Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for Reach 1A of the Herbert Hoover Dike Major Rehabilitation Project**. The report covers the geographic area from Port Mayaca to Sand Cut. Please stay tuned for meeting details.



US Army Corps of Engineers
Jacksonville District